

Audit and Inspection Plan

April 2006



Audit and Inspection Plan

Chester le Street District Council

2006/2007

External audit is an essential element in the process of accountability for public money and makes an important contribution to the stewardship of public resources and the corporate governance of public services.

Audit in the public sector is underpinned by three fundamental principles.

- Auditors are appointed independently from the bodies being audited.
- The scope of auditors' work is extended to cover not only the audit of financial statements but also value for money and the conduct of public business.
- Auditors may report aspects of their work widely to the public and other key stakeholders.

The duties and powers of auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are set out in the Audit Commission Act 1998, the Local Government Act 1999 and the Commission's statutory Code of Audit Practice. Under the Code of Audit Practice, appointed auditors are also required to comply with the current professional standards issued by the independent Auditing Practices Board.

Appointed auditors act quite separately from the Commission and in meeting their statutory responsibilities are required to exercise their professional judgement independently of both the Commission and the audited body.

Status of our audit reports to the Council

The Statement of Responsibilities of Auditors and Audited Bodies issued by the Audit Commission explains the respective responsibilities of auditors and of the audited body. Reports prepared by appointed auditors are addressed to members or officers. They are prepared for the sole use of the audited body. Auditors accept no responsibility to:

- any member or officer in their individual capacity; or
- any third party.

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Introduction

- 1 This plan sets out the audit and inspection work that we propose to undertake in 2006/07. The plan has been drawn up from our risk-based approach to audit planning and reflects:
 - the Code of Audit Practice;
 - Audit and inspection work specified by the Audit Commission for 2006/07;
 - your local risks and improvement priorities; and
 - current national risks relevant to your local circumstances.
- 2 Your relationship manager will continue to help ensure further integration and co-ordination with the work of other inspectorates.
- 3 We have also updated our 2005/6 audit and inspection planning to reflect changing circumstances and new and emerging risks.

Our responsibilities

- 4 In carrying out our audit and inspection duties we have to comply with the statutory requirements governing them, and in particular:
 - the Audit Commission Act 1998;
 - the Code of Audit Practice (the Code) with regard to audit; and
 - the Local Government Act 1999 with regard to best value inspection and audit.
- 5 The Code defines auditors' responsibilities in relation to:
 - The financial statements of audited bodies; and
 - Audited bodies' arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in their use of resources.
- 6 Auditors are now required to draw a positive conclusion regarding the Council's arrangements for ensuring value for money in its use of resources. We will give the first such conclusion by 30 September 2006 as part of the 2005/06 audit.

The fee

- 7 For 2006/07 the Audit Commission has changed its fee scale structure and details are set out in the Commission's Work Programme and Fee scales 2006/07. Audit fees are based on a number of variables, including the type, size, location and complexity of the audited body and the national and local risks.
- 8 Inspection fees are based on the actual number of days included in the plan for each programmed activity.
- 9 The total fee estimate for the audit work planned for 2006/07 is £104,400 and the total fee estimate for inspection work (net of government grant) is £10,600. This compares with a total audit and inspection fee of £115,000 in 2005/06.
- 10 In addition we estimate that we will charge approximately £19,600 for the certification of claims and returns, and £1,500 for certification of your consolidation return for Whole of Government Accounts. Further details are provided below and in Appendix 1.
- 11 The audit and inspection fees include all work identified in this plan unless specifically excluded. Further details are provided in Appendix 1 which includes specific audit risk factors, the assumptions made when determining the audit fee, specific actions Chester le Street District Council could take to reduce its audit fees and the process for agreeing any additional fees.
- 12 Changes to the plan and the fee may be necessary if our audit risk assessment changes during the course of the audit. This is particularly relevant to work related to:
 - the opinion on the 2006/07 accounts since we have yet to audit the accounts for 2005/06 and detailed financial reporting requirements for 2006/07 are not yet known; and
 - work on selected performance indicators, since we have yet to assess your overall arrangements for securing the quality of this data and then to undertake a formal risk assessment.
- 13 We will formally advise you if any changes to the fee become necessary.

Working with other agencies

- 14 On the assumption that the council will retain its 'poor' categorisation for 2006/07, we will continue to work closely with the ODPM monitoring board to support your improvement and recovery.
- 15 As a consequence, our inspection work programme and fee includes the following:
 - attendance at monitoring board meetings; and
 - review of specific areas as requested by ODPM.

Cross-cutting work

- 16 We have discussed with you the proposals by ourselves and audit firms to include work in audit and inspection plans for 2006/07 on two key cross-cutting themes: regeneration and health inequalities.

Health inequalities

- 17 The health inequalities faced by people within the North East are some of the most pronounced in the country. We will work with all audited and inspected bodies in the North East to assess the way organisations work together to address health issues and to identify the levers and barriers to improvement. Our work will have three phases.
- Phase 1: an overview of the way in which bodies involved in the health inequalities issue work together, how they involve other stakeholders, and how they involve service users. This will be done via a series of approaches, including data analysis, partner surveys, and interviews.
 - Phase 2: a workshop of partners reviewing the barriers to better health outcomes, and the options for resolving those barriers, using data collected at Phase 1.
 - Phase 3: detailed work on a range of specific health issues, to be tailored to the requirements of each geographic area within the North East, choosing from smoking cessation, obesity, teenage pregnancy, access to health services, and substance misuse. This work will triangulate the information and assurances defined through the first two stages of work.
- 18 Phases 1 and 2 are likely to be completed in 2006/07, with phase 3 beginning during the early part of 2007.

Regeneration

- 19 There has been slow progress on closing the gap in economic performance between the North East and the country as a whole, and between the quality of life of the most disadvantaged communities and those nationally. Councils have a crucial role in delivering services in a way that encourages regeneration, and in leading the development of robust partnerships and delivery chains across the many agencies with a role in regeneration, often across geographic areas bigger than a single council.
- 20 In County Durham, the county and district councils are negotiating a Local Area Agreement. During the winter of 2006/07 we will inspect how well the councils respond to this new agenda in the context of their location between the two identified city regions of Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear. We will provide the Council with its own report (with inspection judgements) and will provide an overview report for the whole county. Details will be discussed with all councils in the months before the inspection.

CPA and inspections

- 21 The CPA framework for District Councils from 2006 is currently subject to consultation. The opportunity for re-categorisation will be available for some councils during 2006/07.
- 22 If Chester le Street District Council succeeds in its ambition to qualify for a corporate assessment in 2006/07, we will discuss an amendment to this plan and agree an additional fee for completion of that work.
- 23 Our proposed inspection activity (not including a possible corporate assessment) is set out below.

Table 1 Summary of inspection activity

Inspection activity	Reason/impact
Relationship Manager role	To act as the Commission’s primary point with the authority and the interface at the local level between the Commission and the other inspectorates, Government Offices and other key stakeholders.
Direction of Travel review	To provide focus for continuous improvement.
County-wide regeneration inspection	To assess the Council's approach to and achievements in regeneration; we will also include the Council in an overview report for the whole county.
Monitoring work for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	Ongoing work to provide reports for the Government Monitoring Board for the Council; in 2006/07 we will focus on four areas: Service Improvement Team, Customer Service, Organisational Development and Community Engagement. We will keep this programme under review during the year.

Summary of key audit risks

- 24** This section summarises our assessment and the planned response to the key audit risks which may have an impact on our objectives to:
- provide an opinion on your financial statements;
 - provide a conclusion on your use of resources;
 - provide a scored judgment on the use of resources to feed into the CPA process;
 - undertake audit work in relation to specified performance indicators to support the service assessment element of CPA; and
 - provide a report on the Council's best value performance plan (BVPP).
- 25** In assessing risk we have:
- considered outcomes from previous year's audit and inspection work;
 - held regular meetings with officers;
 - read council minutes and agenda papers;
 - reviewed key documents such as your community strategy, corporate plan, risk register, budgets and outturn reports;
 - assessed the relevance of risks highlighted nationally by the Audit Commission; and
 - considered area profiles.
- 26** Our planned work takes into account information from other regulators, where available. Where risks are identified that are not mitigated by information from other regulators, or your own risk management processes, including Internal Audit, we will perform work as appropriate to enable us to provide a conclusion on your arrangements.

Value for money conclusion

- 27** The Code of Audit Practice requires us to issue a conclusion on whether you have proper arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of your resources (the value for money conclusion). The Audit Commission has developed relevant criteria for auditors to apply in reaching our value for money conclusion as required under the Code of Audit Practice. These criteria are listed in Appendix 2.
- 28** In meeting this responsibility, we will review evidence that is relevant to the Council's corporate performance management and financial management arrangements. We will give the first such conclusion by the end of September 2006 as part our audit of the 2005/06 accounts. This may influence our risk assessment for similar work to be carried out as part of the 2006/07 and we will keep you informed of any changes to this plan that may become necessary.

Use of resources judgement

- 29 Over and above the Code requirements described above, the Audit Commission requires auditors to make more qualitative assessments of the effectiveness of those arrangements in the form of a series of use of resources judgements. The key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) issued in June 2005 will be updated in Spring 2006 to reflect the lessons learned from the first year's experiences of applying the KLOEs, following a post implementation review of the assessment. Our fee estimate 2006/07 assumes that the KLOEs will be broadly similar to those used in 2005/06. If this changes we will discuss with you the implications, including any impact on the fee.
- 30 These judgements may also used by the Commission as the basis for its overall use of resources judgement.
- 31 Using our cumulative knowledge and experience, including the results of previous work and other regulators' work, we have identified the following areas of audit risk to be addressed.

Table 2 Summary of use of resources audit risks

Audit risk	Response
The Council fails to develop effective asset management.	We will monitor progress and assess the corporate approach to asset management.
The Council fails to link financial and service delivery plans and monitor performance against financial indicators.	We will review the Council's financial and service delivery plans to assess the links, and review budgetary control.
Formal arrangements may not be in place to demonstrate that the Council provide value for money.	We will review the Council's approach to demonstrating value for money and track progress on action plans to improve processes for managing, reviewing and improving value for money, as contained in IRP2.
The Council will contribute to partnerships but will not be able to demonstrate that they provide value for money or achieve the desired outcomes.	We will carry out cross cutting work across public bodies in Durham to assess the arrangements in place for specific partnerships.

Performance information

- 32 In 2006/07, auditors are required to undertake audit work in relation to specified performance indicators to support the service assessment element of CPA, subject to the basis of the agreed methodology. This work will be risk based and will link at least in part to our review of the Council's overall arrangements to secure data quality (as required for our value for money conclusion).
- 33 On the basis of last year's outcomes, our fee estimate assumes that Chester le Street District Council will be medium risk in relation to its performance indicators.
- 34 This risk assessment may change depending on our assessment of your overall arrangements. When we have finalised our risk assessment we will update our plan including any impact on the fee.

Best value Performance Plan

- 35 We are also required to report on whether or not you have complied with legislation and statutory guidance in respect of the preparation and publication of your Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP).

Financial statements

- 36 We will carry out our audit of the 2006/07 financial statements and follow the International Standards on Auditing (UK & Ireland).
- 37 We are also required to review whether the Statement on Internal Control has been presented in accordance with relevant requirements and to report if it does not meet these requirements or if the statement is misleading or inconsistent with our knowledge of the Authority.

Table 3 Summary of Opinion risks

Opinion risks	Response
The Council may fail to produce accurate financial statements on time, with adequate supporting working papers.	We will review arrangements for producing the accounts to the required deadlines and discuss working papers.

Opinion risks	Response
The Council may fail to meet the requirement for local government accounts to become fully UK GAAP compliant in 2006/07.	Although detailed reporting requirements have not yet been finalised, this is likely to involve significant changes to the presentation of the revenue account, balance sheet and statement of movement on reserves. To mitigate this risk we intend to share technical information with officers as soon as it becomes available, to reach a common understanding of the new requirements.
The Council may not correctly account for proposed transfer of its housing stock.	We will monitor the transfer process and review the accounting proposals.
Information technology is increasingly central to the delivery of services and the production and availability of information. The Council may not have the capacity and skills to react to these increased demands.	We will use a web based called 'Your Business @ Risk' that helps auditors and authorities focus on the business risks associated with information and communications technology.

- 38 Our fee estimate for 2006/07 is based on the assumption that:
- the current standard of working papers will be improved;
 - the draft statement of accounts will be approved by members by 30 June 2007;
 - supporting working papers will be made available for audit by 15 July 2007; and
 - internal audit will complete their planned work on key information systems to the agreed quality and by 30 April 2007.
- 39 We have yet to undertake the audit of the 2005/06 financial statements and our 2006/07 financial statements audit planning will continue as the year progresses. This will take account of:
- the 2005/06 opinion audit;
 - our documentation and initial testing of material information systems;
 - our assessment of the 2006/07 closedown arrangements; and
 - any changes in financial reporting requirements.

- 40 When we have finalised our risk assessment in respect of your financial statements, we will update our plan in advance of the audit detailing our specific approach, including any impact on the fee quoted above.

Whole of government accounts

- 41 The government is introducing whole of government accounts (WGA) in order to produce consolidated accounts for the whole public sector. WGA will include the accounts of local authorities and WGA data returns will be required to be audited. The Audit Commission has recently issued guidance on the scope of audit work required, and has advised us that fee for an authority of your size will be £1,500. We will confirm the fee and discuss this in more detail with you when detailed guidance becomes available.

Claims and returns certification

- 42 We will continue to certify the Council's claims and returns.
- Claims for £50,000 or below will not be subject to certification.
 - Claims between £50,001 and £100,000 will be subject to a reduced, light touch, certification audit.
 - Claims over £100,000 have an audit approach relevant to the auditor's assessment of the control environment and management preparation of claims. A robust control environment would lead to a reduced audit approach for these claims.
- 43 Charges for this work are based on skill-related fees scales set out in the Audit Commission's work programme and fee scales 2006/07. Based on this, and on the assumption that the number of grant claims requiring certification will remain unchanged, we estimate that the fees for grant certification work will be around £19,600.

Voluntary improvement work

- 44 We will continue to hold regular meetings with officers to suggest areas where we would be well placed to provide additional support to the Council's improvement priorities outside our statutory framework of risk based audit and inspection, for example on areas such as access to services and shared services.

Other information

Outputs from the audit and inspection plan

- 45 The expected outputs from our planned audit and inspection work are listed in Appendix 3.

The team

Table 4

Name	Title
Sarah Diggle	Relationship Manager and Area Performance Lead
Steve Nicklin	District Auditor
Caroline Tyrrell	Audit Manager
Ross Woodley	Audit Team Leader
Martin Baird	IT Specialist
Martin Oliver	Performance Specialist
Alison Brown	Lead Housing Inspector

- 46 We are not aware of any relationships that may affect the independence and objectivity of the team, and which are required to be disclosed under auditing and ethical standards.
- We comply with the ethical standards promulgated by the Auditing Practices Board and with the Commission’s requirements in respect of independence and objectivity as set out at Appendix 4.

Future audit and inspection plans

- 47 As part of our planning process, we have taken the opportunity to look at potential issues for future years' programmes. Key areas identified include:
- delivery of IRP2;
 - housing stock transfer;
 - option appraisal for leisure services;
 - consultation on local government reorganisation; and
 - potential CPA corporate assessment.
- 48 We will discuss these in more detail as the audit year progresses.

Appendix 1 – Audit and inspection fee

Table 5

Fee estimate	Plan 2006/07	Plan 2005/06
Audit		
Accounts	60,700	60,000
Use of resources	43,700	40,000
Total audit fee	104,400	100,000
Inspection		*
Relationship management	2300	*
Service inspection (regeneration)	4200	*
Direction of travel	1350	*
Recovery support/Government Monitoring Board	2750	*
CPA corporate assessment	**	*
Total inspection fee	10600	*
Total audit and inspection fee	£115,000	£115,000
Certification of claims and returns	19,600	19,200
Whole of Government Accounts	£1,500	£1,500
Voluntary improvement work	0	0

* Comparative information is not available for 2005/06 due to the changed fee structure.

** We will inform the Council of the additional fee payable if it should gain a CPA corporate assessment during 2006/07.

- 1 The total audit and inspection fee compared to the indicative fee banding equates to 12 per cent above the mid-point.
- 2 The fee (plus VAT) will be charged in 12 equal instalments from April 2006 to March 2007.
- 3 The fee above includes all work contained in this plan except:
 - any work required in relation to the Whole of Government Accounts (see paragraph 41 above); and
 - any specific work required for CPA in 2006/07.

Specific audit risk factors

- 4 In setting the audit fee we have taken account of the following specific risk factors:
 - use of resources scores on value for money and asset management;
 - 2005 mock housing inspection outcomes; and
 - proposals for housing stock transfer.

Assumptions

- 5 In setting the audit fee we have assumed:
 - an overall materiality level of £0.8 million;
 - you will inform us of significant developments impacting on our audit;
 - Internal Audit meets the appropriate professional standards;
 - Internal Audit undertakes appropriate work on all material information systems that provide figures in the financial statements sufficient that we can place reliance for the purposes of our audit recognising the shift in requirements introduced by the International Standards on Auditing (ISA);
 - officers will provide good quality working papers and records to support the financial statements by 15 July 2007. Based on our experience in previous years, we anticipate that the key risk areas within the financial statements will relate to capital accounting, capital financing, preparations for LSVT and compliance with SORP presentation/disclosure requirements;
 - officers will provide requested information within agreed timescales;
 - officers will provide prompt responses to draft reports; and
 - your Performance Indicators will be adequately prepared and reviewed.
- 6 The key lines of enquiry (KLOEs) issued in June 2005 will be updated in Spring 2006 to reflect the lessons learned from the first year's experiences of applying the KLOEs, following a post implementation review of the assessment.
- 7 Where these requirements are not met or our assumptions change, we will be required to undertake additional work which is likely to result in an increased audit fee.
- 8 Changes to the plan will be agreed with you. These may be required if:
 - new risks emerge;
 - additional work is required of us by the Audit Commission or other regulators; and
 - there are any changes to financial reporting requirement, professional auditing standards or legislation which results in additional work.

Specific actions Chester le Street District Council could take to reduce its audit fees

- 9 The Audit Commission requires its auditors to inform a council of specific actions it could take to reduce its audit fees. We have identified the following actions Chester le Street District Council could take:
- improve project management of the final accounts preparation and audit process;
 - ensure that working papers are available to support all material figures in the financial statements, and clearly cross referenced to supporting evidence; and
 - review draft accounts to ensure that they comply with all relevant SORP presentation and disclosure requirements.

Process for agreeing any changes in audit fees

- 10 If we need to amend the audit or inspection fees during the course of this plan we will firstly discuss this with the Director of Resources. We will then prepare a report outlining the reasons why the fee needs to change.

Appendix 2 – Criteria to inform the auditor’s conclusion on proper arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources

Arrangements for establishing strategic and operational objectives

- 1 The body has put in place arrangements for setting, reviewing and implementing its strategic and operational objectives.

Arrangements for ensuring that services meet the needs of users and taxpayers, and for engaging with the wider community

- 2 The body has put in place channels of communication with service users and other stakeholders including partners, and there are monitoring arrangements to ensure that key messages about services are taken into account.

Arrangements for monitoring and reviewing performance, including arrangements to ensure data quality

- 3 The body has put in place arrangements for monitoring and scrutiny of performance, to identify potential variances against strategic objectives, standards and targets, for taking action where necessary, and reporting to members.
- 4 The body has put in place arrangements to monitor the quality of its published performance information, and to report the results to members.

Arrangements for ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations

- 5 The body has put in place arrangements to maintain a sound system of internal control.

Arrangements for identifying, evaluating and managing operational and financial risks and opportunities, including those arising from involvement in partnerships and joint working

- 6 The body has put in place arrangements to manage its significant business risks.

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Arrangements for ensuring compliance with the general duty of best value

- 7 The body has put in place arrangements to manage and improve value for money.

Arrangements for managing its financial and other resources, including arrangements to safeguard the financial standing of the audited body

- 8 The body has put in place a medium-term financial strategy, budgets and a capital programme that are soundly based and designed to deliver its strategic priorities.
- 9 The body has put in place arrangements to ensure that its spending matches its available resources.
- 10 The body has put in place arrangements for managing performance against budgets.
- 11 The body has put in place arrangements for the management of its asset base.

Arrangements for ensuring that the audited body’s affairs are managed in accordance with proper standards of conduct, and to prevent and detect fraud and corruption

- 12 The body has put in place arrangements that are designed to promote and ensure probity and propriety in the conduct of its business.

Appendix 3 – Planned outputs

- 1 Our reports will be discussed and agreed with the appropriate officers before being issued to the Audit Committee.

Table 6

Planned output	Start date	Draft due date	Key contact
Audit and Inspection Plan*	February 2006	April 2006	Relationship Manager
BVPP opinion and PI audit memorandum	July 2006	September 2006	Audit Manager
Health inequalities work	TBA	TBA	Relationship Manager
Reports to Government Monitoring Board	July 2006	December 2006	Relationship Manager
County-wide regeneration inspection	November 2006	March 2007	Relationship Manager
Annual Audit and Inspection Letter 2006 (including direction of travel review)	November 2006	March 2007	Relationship Manager
Interim audit memorandum	April 2007	August 2007	Audit Manager
Report on financial statements to those charged with governance (ISA 260)	September 2007	September 2007	Audit Manager
Opinion on financial statements	July 2007	September 2007	Audit Manager
VFM conclusion	August 2007	September 2007	Performance Lead
Final accounts memorandum	September 2007	October 2007	Audit Manager
Annual audit and inspection letter 2007 (including direction of travel review)	November 2007	March 2008	Relationship Manager

* To be revisited during the year to reflect outcome of 2005/06 and 2006/07 interim work.

Appendix 4 – The Audit Commission’s requirements in respect of independence and objectivity

- 1 Auditors appointed by the Audit Commission are subject to the Code of Audit Practice (the Code) which includes the requirement to comply with ISA UKIs when auditing the financial statements. Professional standards require auditors to communicate to those charged with governance, at least annually, all relationships that may bear on the firm’s independence and the objectivity of the audit engagement partner and audit staff. Standards also place requirements on auditors in relation to integrity, objectivity and independence.
- 2 The standards define ‘those charged with governance’ as ‘those persons entrusted with the supervision, control and direction of an entity’. In your case the appropriate addressee of communications from the auditor to those charged with governance is the Audit Committee. The auditor reserves the right, however, to communicate directly with the Council on matters which are considered to be of sufficient importance.
- 3 Auditors are required by the Code to:
 - carry out their work with independence and objectivity;
 - exercise their professional judgement and act independently of both the Commission and the audited body;
 - maintain an objective attitude at all times and not act in any way that might give rise to, or be perceived to give rise to, a conflict of interest; and
 - resist any improper attempt to influence their judgement in the conduct of the audit.
- 4 In addition, the Code specifies that auditors should not carry out work for an audited body that does not relate directly to the discharge of the auditors’ functions under the Code. If the Council invites us to carry out risk-based work in a particular area, which cannot otherwise be justified to support our audit conclusions, it will be clearly differentiated as work carried out under s 35 of the Audit Commission Act 1998.
- 5 The Code also states that the Commission issues guidance under its powers to appoint auditors and to determine their terms of appointment. The Standing Guidance for Auditors includes several references to arrangements designed to support and reinforce the requirements relating to independence, which auditors must comply with. These are as follows.
 - Any staff involved on Commission work who wish to engage in political activity should obtain prior approval from the Partner or Regional Director.
 - Audit staff are expected not to accept appointments as lay school inspectors.

- Firms are expected not to risk damaging working relationships by bidding for work within an audited body’s area in direct competition with the body’s own staff without having discussed and agreed a local protocol with the body concerned.
- Auditors are expected to comply with the Commission’s statements on firms not providing personal financial or tax advice to certain senior individuals at their audited bodies, auditors’ conflicts of interest in relation to PFI procurement at audited bodies, and disposal of consultancy practices and auditors’ independence.
- Auditors appointed by the Commission should not accept engagements which involve commenting on the performance of other Commission auditors on Commission work without first consulting the Commission.
- Auditors are expected to comply with the Commission’s policy for both the District Auditor/Partner and the second in command (Senior Manager/Manager) to be changed on each audit at least once every five years with effect from 1 April 2003 (subject to agreed transitional arrangements).
- Audit suppliers are required to obtain the Commission’s written approval prior to changing any District Auditor or Audit Partner/Director in respect of each audited body.
- the Commission must be notified of any change of second in command within one month of making the change. Where a new Partner/Director or second in command has not previously undertaken audits under the Audit Commission Act 1998 or has not previously worked for the audit supplier, the audit supplier is required to provide brief details of the individual’s relevant qualifications, skills and experience.